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ABSTRACT

The instructional behaviors and related competencies of school superintendents and the contexts in which they occur are investigated in this qualitative study. Methodology involved grounded theory-based content analysis of indepth interviews with a reputationally identified sample of 48 Texas school superintendents. Analysis of behaviors produced 24 instructional competencies, 5 skill areas, 5 personal variables, and 10 situational variables, which were compared with current school-based management literature on leadership practices. A profile of a skilled and actively involved leader emerged, which conflicts with the administrator role described in educational administration literature. That leaders expressed a preference for independent, entrepreneurial action has implications for the implementation of shared governance plans, particularly when considering the leadership role of the superintendent in school-based management. An implication for administrator preparation and retraining programs is that collaborative process training should be provided. (75 references) (LMI)

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Instructional Leadership Skills and Competencies of Public School Superintendents: *Implications for Preparation Programs in a Climate of Shared Governance*

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Instructional Leadership Skills and Competencies of Public School Superintendents: ***Implications for Preparation Programs in a Climate of Shared Governance***

The national focus on the plight of education, marked by a series of task force and commission reports, emphasizes the need for a sweep of reform aimed at the instillation of more academic rigor. The structure and management of the school site is under scrutiny, with a consequential intensive focus on the educational leadership at the local level. The role of the public school superintendent as a catalytic element in this wave of school reform is critical; comprehensive and highly specialized preparation for this responsibility is essential. A tandem need exists for an appropriate and effective system of ongoing superintendency leadership development. This broad spectrum of training requires a content area of instructional leadership, given the national thrust for academic excellence and instructional quality. These skills and competencies are largely absent in current preparation and inservice programs. A reconceptualizing of this training demands task specificity and priority, particularly in the technical core area of the academic process and the instructional leadership dynamics affecting that process.

Public school superintendents charged with instructional accountability have been historically unprepared for past and contemporary critical instructional problems. Those dynamics were the focus of this study, with the intended outcome of identifying the personally and situationally-impacted competencies and skills accruing to the superintendent's instructional leadership role.

Implied in that instructional leadership dimension is the current and steadily increasing demand for superintendency acumen and initiative in school-based management. While many of the implementation demands of a collaborative, shared decision-making structure are executed by the school business official and the individual principal, the documented role of the superintendent in the nurturance of school-based management is critical in its symbolic leadership and resource-providing role. Many of the findings of this initial instructional leadership study are tangential to or apply directly to the demands on the superintendent in a school-based management and shared governance climate. This paper extends this recent research on superintendency behaviors to apply to that current field, evaluating the study's outcomes in light of reform demands for professional collaboration and shared decision-making. The research findings will be compared with a key point summary of recent literature on school-based management.

Overview of Original Research

This research investigated the behaviors of school superintendents which were related to curriculum and instruction, identifying their instructional leadership-associated skills and competencies, and the personal and situational variables that impinge on those skills and competencies.

The superintendent of schools is one of the most crucial and perhaps most difficult of public positions; the occupant, more than anyone else in the community, influences the shape of public education. School administrators must master a body of knowledge that includes both the study of the science and the study of the technical core of the profession, but the most common content of both preparation and inservice is often described as unrelated to managerial work. Practitioners frequently claim that they are unprepared for the realities of their jobs. The actual day-to-day activities of superintendents are largely unspecified and are not reflected in the preparation and training content of university programs. The lack of a definition of educational leadership was found to be a significant problem in the 1987 National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration's Leaders for America's Schools. The central problem in administrator preparation is often viewed as the discrepancy between the content of of the training program and the reality of the demands of the workplace. A documented lack of confidence in the public schools and the calls for reform have focused attention on the instructional quality of school districts. While superintendents are believed to have a substantial impact on that educational system, only a few studies have investigated the impact of the chief executive officer. The documented lack of a knowledge base about educational administrative activity is acutely true of studies on superintendents' behavior. The significant question of the effects or effectiveness of superintendents remains largely unanswered, and represents a major gap in the data base. The framework for the study was designed to derive from management theory as it has influenced the historical theories of educational administration, tracing the development of the local school district as a particular bureaucratic structure and the concurrent evolution of the superintendency. There is a sense of heightened need for more qualitative research because of the growing concern about the shortcomings of quantitative methods for revealing organizational dynamics. A research summary on such methodology revealed a consensus for qualitative inquiry and for the need to capture both the behavioral aspects of superintending and the context of their occurrence. This study was therefore naturalistic in inquiry, (and phenomenological in origin), qualitative in methodology, and was intended to discover the instructionally-related behaviors of these leaders and to describe and classify the skills and competencies accruing to those behaviors.

The qualitative methodology of this study employed a depth interview process framed around the critical incident technique, in order to reveal the salient instructional behaviors of effective superintendents. A reputationally-identified sample of forty-eight Texas school superintendents were interviewed on site by a team of researchers employing a cooperatively-designed and field-tested instrument which was structured to capture the skills and strategies of the superintendents as they described critical events in their experience.

The data thus obtained was subsequently analyzed through the process of constant comparative analysis and the formulation of emergent design and grounded theory. The four criteria of trustworthiness also shaped the data analysis process at various stages.

From the field data (transcripts and audiotapes) those responses to the interview questions which were determined by an operational definition to be instructionally related were selected for systematic analysis of instructional behaviors at a low level of inference. These 508 behaviors derived from the data were sorted through a content analysis process into twenty-four instructional competencies, from which were derived, at a higher level of inference, five instructional skill areas. Those attitudinal behaviors described by the superintendents were sorted into five categories of personal variables, which impinge on the instructional leadership competencies and skills. A systematic analysis of the contexts of the instructionally-related questions produced ten situational variables which also impact those competencies and skills.

Research Questions and Findings

(1) What are the behaviors that school superintendents exhibit which are related to curriculum and instruction?

BEHAVIORAL CONTENT CATEGORIES

1. *Innovations/Training Content*
2. *Planning/Goal Setting*
3. *Academic Focus*
4. *Instructional Programs*
5. *Organizing Personnel*
13. *Developmental Supervision*
14. *Training*
15. *Future and Societal Concerns*
16. *Climate*
17. *Visibility*
18. *At-Risk*

6. *Principal and Teacher Empowerment*
7. *Reorganizing for General Education*
8. *Adding Personnel*
9. *Informing the Board*
10. *Curriculum*
11. *Future and Curriculum*
12. *Informing the Community*
19. *Instructional Meetings*
20. *Testing*
21. *Facilities*
22. *Buffering the Technical Core*
23. *Technology*
24. *Multi-Cultural*

2) What instructional leadership-associated skills and competencies can be derived from the behaviors of school superintendents?

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Allocating Instructional Personnel Program

Organizing Instructional Personnel
Obtaining Personnel Resources
Empowering Instructional Personnel

Organizing the Instructional Program

Organizing for General Education
Organizing for Special Programs
Designing Curriculum

Supporting the Instructional Program

Focusing on Learning and Achievement
Providing Symbolic Leadership
Communicating for Instruction
Educating the Board of Trustees
Educating the Community
Providing Appropriate Facilities
Protecting the Technical Core
Providing for Students At-Risk
Developing a Multi-Cultural Environment

Developing Instructional Personnel

Implementing Innovation and Training
Providing Developmental Supervision
Developing Personal Leadership
Creating Climate

Planning for the Instructional Program

Strategically Planning
Visioning for Instructional Content
Visioning for Societal Impact
Visioning for Technology
Monitoring Achievement

(3) What are the personal and situational variables that impinge on the instructional leadership skills and competencies of school superintendents?

PERSONAL VARIABLES IMPINGING ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Personal Variables

1. *Maintains Academic Focus*
2. *Demonstrates Instructional Leadership*
3. *Focuses on Measurement and Evaluation*
4. *Communicates High Expectations*
5. *Provides Climate*

SITUATIONAL VARIABLES IMPINGING ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Situational Variables

1. *Support for School Mission and Program-Related*
2. *Instructional Focus-Related*
3. *Restructuring of Personnel and Programs-Related*
4. *Personnel Development-Related*
5. *Finance and Compliance-Related*
6. *Instructional-Innovation-Related*
7. *Planning-Related*
8. *Facilities-Related*
9. *Future-Related*
10. *Climate-Related*

Summary of Findings Related to Identified Superintendency Instructional Leadership Skills and Competencies

Those skills and competencies which reflected a commonality of *independent or entrepreneurial action* by the superintendent were more consistently substantiated in the behaviors assigned and seemed to be more prevalent in the data. Planning, innovating, organizing, and other less collaborative competencies were more common by behavioral definition. As was noted earlier, however, the wealth of detail which accompanied many of these descriptions may have increased the behavioral count unduly. The complexity of the strategies and the novelty of the processes, (since many were innovative) created longer narrative. High success seemed to prevail in these areas, as well as in the far less critical

and affective/future-related competencies and skills. The presence of critical incidents in the competencies occurred most strongly in the instructional technical core area.

A mixture of critical incidence and success characterized the instructional skills, partly due to their larger categorical nature. The allocation of instructional personnel and the organization of the instructional program were the most consistently successful of the skills; the development of instructional personnel was highly critical but mixed in outcomes. A skewing effect may have occurred in those skills with one or more competencies high in critical incidence, but low in success, such as the developmental supervision (and hence legally/due process-impacted) competency which was categorized under the development of instructional personnel. The variety of competencies comprising the skill of support for the instructional program resulted in moderate behavioral frequency and critical incidence - an averaging effect. It was noted previously that the competencies and related skills which involved the superintendent *in collaboration or cooperative effort with intraorganizational or extraorganizational influences* were less frequent and critical in outcome. The *interaction and negotiation process* involved in such activities may have tempered the perceived success level.

The phrases *independent or entrepreneurial action* describe leadership activities potentially in conflict with shared governance; the *collaboration and cooperative effort with intraorganizational or extraorganizational influences* and the *interaction and negotiation process* inhibiting effect on perceived success likewise implies a reluctance or sensitivity to working in a climate of shared governance.

Summary of Findings Related to Personal and Situational Variables Impinging on Skills and Competencies

The personal variables, being attitudinally derived, did not cluster around any one competency or skill, but were diffused across all the competencies and skills. They were therefore low in critical incidence, and likewise low to moderate in success. The variable of *climate* was high in success and in critical incidence; *instructional leadership* was low to moderate in critical incidence and success, due to its sensitive content of personnel action.

The situational variables of facilities, *climate*, and *planning* were relatively strong in critical incidence and success; finance and personnel leadership, areas with conflictive budgetary and legal implications, were logically low in success. The pattern of low critical incidence paired with high success prevailed in several of the contexts.

Climate, instructional leadership, and planning are leadership areas directly affecting, and to some extent, shaping, shared governance and school based management.

Superintendents displaying these personal variables and strongly responding to these situational variables may indeed possess the attitudinal and executive readiness for leading districts implementing a shared governance model.

Comparison of Instructional Leadership Skills and Competencies to School-Based Management Practice

A key point summary of recent field opinion and practitioner experience and outcome with shared governance and school-based management follows, much of it derived from Anne Lewis's 1989 AASA publication Restructuring America's Schools, and from other recent publications on these topics. These common conclusions on practice are compared to the findings on superintendency instructional leadership skills, competencies, personal variables, and situational variables. A brief analysis of the implications for leadership preparation and retraining follows.

•**Common practice**-Decisions on **budget, curriculum,** and **personnel** represent the three crucial areas for school-based management

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES OF SUPERINTENDENTS

Allocating Instructional Personnel
(personnel)

Organizing Instructional Personnel
Obtaining Personnel Resources
Empowering Instructional Personnel

Supporting the Instructional Program
(curriculum/budget)

Focusing on Learning and Achievement
Providing Symbolic Leadership
Communicating for Instruction
Educating the Board of Trustees
Educating the Community
Providing Appropriate Facilities
Protecting the Technical Core
Providing for Students At-Risk
Developing a Multi-Cultural Environment

Organizing the Instructional Program
(curriculum)

Organizing for General Education
Organizing for Special Programs
Designing Curriculum

Developing Instructional Personnel
(personnel)

Implementing Innovation and Training
Providing Developmental Supervision
Developing Personal Leadership
Creating Climate

Planning for the Instructional Program
(budget, curriculum, personnel)

Strategically Planning
Visioning for Instructional Content
Visioning for Societal Impact
Visioning for Technology
Monitoring Achievement

PERSONAL VARIABLES IMPINGING ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

1. *Maintains Academic Focus* **(curriculum)**
2. *Demonstrates Instructional Leadership* **(budget, curriculum, personnel)**
3. *Focuses on Measurement and Evaluation* **(curriculum)**
4. *Communicates High Expectations* **(curriculum, personnel)**
5. *Provides Climate* **(personnel)**

SITUATIONAL VARIABLES IMPINGING ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

1. *Support for School Mission and Program-Related* **(budget)**
2. *Instructional Focus-Related* **(curriculum)**
3. *Restructuring of Personnel and Programs-Related* **(personnel)**
4. *Personnel Development-Related* **(personnel)**
5. *Finance and Compliance-Related* **(budget)**
6. *Instructional-Innovation-Related* **(curriculum)**
7. *Planning-Related* **(budget, curriculum, personnel)**
8. *Facilities-Related* **(budget)**
9. *Future-Related* **(budget, curriculum,personnel)**
10. *Climate-Related* **(personnel)**

•**Common practice**-The central person in school-based management programs is the principal, whose roles changes as instructional leader, as mediator of shared governance, and as a more authoritative figure in the district chain of command

Providing Symbolic Leadership
Demonstrates Instructional Leadership

•**Common outcome**-Communication with students and parents improves in these schools, especially through the school governance councils

Educating the Board of Trustees
Educating the Community
Communicates High Expectations

•**Common practice and recommendation**-Decisions that might be made at the site level include:

-Developing educational priorities for the building and the students
Strategically Planning
Visioning for Instructional Content
Visioning for Societal Impact
Visioning for Technology
Monitoring Achievement
Demonstrates Instructional Leadership
Focuses on Measurement and Evaluation
Communicates High Expectations
Instructional-Focus-Related
Planning-Related
Future-Related

-Developing new programs to meet the needs of the students
-Developing scheduling to meet instructional goals
-Selecting supplemental instructional materials
Organizing for General Education
Organizing for Special Programs
Designing Curriculum
Demonstrates Instructional Leadership
Instructional Innovation-Related

-Allocating resources to best meet the needs of students
Implementing Innovation and Training
Providing Developmental Supervision
Providing Appropriate Facilities
Protecting the Technical Core
Providing for Students At-Risk
Developing a Multi-Cultural Environment
Demonstrates Instructional Leadership
Support for School Mission and Program-Related
Instructional Focus-Related
Instructional Innovation-Related
Finance and Compliance-Related
Facilities-related

-Selecting applicants from a pool of pre-screened candidates
Obtaining Personnel Resources
Restructuring of Personnel and Programs-Related
Personnel Development-Related

•**Common practice and recommendation**-The school district level could continue:

-Developing districtwide priorities
Strategically Planning
Visioning for Instructional Content
Visioning for Societal Impact
Visioning for Technology
Monitoring Achievement
Maintains Academic Focus
Demonstrates Instructional Leadership
Communicates High Expectations
Instructional Focus-Related
Planning-Related
Future-Related

-Developing grade level objectives and curriculum
Organizing for General Education
Organizing for Special Programs
Designing Curriculum
Demonstrates Instructional Leadership
Support for School Mission and Program-Related
Instructional Focus-Related
Restructuring of Personnel and Programs-Related
Instructional Innovation-Related

-Supervising capital expenditure
Providing Appropriate Facilities
Finance and Compliance-Related
Facilities-Related

-Selecting principals
-Screening job applicants
Obtaining Personnel Resources
Restructuring of Personnel and Programs-Related
Personnel Development-Related

Superintendent strategies to nurture site teams were also recommended in Restructuring America's Schools.

•**Common practice and recommendation**-provide time for meetings
Organizing Instructional Personnel
Obtaining Personnel Resources
Empowering Instructional Personnel
Implementing Innovation and Training
Demonstrates Instructional Leadership
Support for School Mission and Program-Related
Personnel Development-Related

•**Common practice and recommendation**-give importance to the planning team and products

Focusing on Learning and Achievement
Creating Climate
Demonstrates Instructional Leadership
Provides Climate
Support for School Mission and Program-Related
Personnel Development-Related

•**Common practice and recommendation**-the superintendent must be the strongest and most vocal supporter

Communicating for Instruction
Developing Personal Leadership
Demonstrates Instructional Leadership
Provides Climate
Support for School Mission and Program-Related

•**Common practice and recommendation**-the superintendent and board must be involved in a personal way

Providing Symbolic Leadership
Educating the Board of Trustees
Educating the Community
Instructional Innovation-Related
Planning-Related

•**Common practice and recommendation**-the superintendent must monitor process and results

Monitoring Achievement
Focuses on Measurement and Evaluation

Conclusion

In investigating the instructional leadership dimension of reputational superintendents, the profile of a skilled and actively involved dynamic leader emerged, whose instructional acumen and sense of the technical core function is a clear departure from the typical role as described in superintendency and educational administrative literature. The study's outcomes encompassed not only the competencies and skills; personal and situational variables, but also the sense of effectiveness and of the role dimension to the participants; the instructionally-related critical incidents were largely considered to be successful in outcome. From a total of 183 critical incidents identified in the interviews, 110 were determined to be instructional; this represented 60 percent of all the incidents. Of those instructionally-related incidents, 79 percent were determined to be successful in outcome.

The comparison of the original study's findings and common practice in school-based management and shared governance is intended to point out areas of overlap and,

perhaps, potential interdistrict conflict. The original study was undertaken to identify salient instructionally-related characteristics of exemplary school district leaders; the findings understandably reflect the traditional areas of superintendent and central office responsibility. Many of those identified characteristics, as displayed in the superintendent site team nurturance strategy comparison, would seem to support and facilitate shared governance and school-based management. However, the outcomes regarding superintendent perception and attitude about success in instructional incidents reflect a preference for independence of action and self-reliance. As noted before, if entrepreneurship and decision-making ownership is a preferred superintendency managerial style, then substantial change will be required to implement shared governance, particularly so when considering the critical leadership and initiative role of the superintendent in school-based management. School-based management demands, to a certain extent, a voluntary divesting of power and control; superintendents may perceive that they are not only expected to be an initiator and catalyst for shared governance, but that they are expected, simultaneously, to be the architects and facilitators of their own abdication. Profound role change occurs during the process of empowerment and the sharing of governance.

Such change, both in decision-making attitude and in sheer collaborative skill aptitude, must be provided for incumbent school leaders approaching a shared governance implementation. It should also be included in competency training provided in administrator preparation programs. Given the research and field response on the inadequacy of current administrative training, such content and skill areas as group decision-making models and processes, collaborative strategies, team development, and employee empowerment are possibly absent in many existing preparation and retraining programs. As collaborative process training they do, of course, exist in university business and management preparation programs and in private sector executive and employee training. Many innovative school administrators do access such training through these avenues.

Application of these shared-governance prerequisites to the field should occur in these training process. The identified salient characteristics of superintendency instructional leadership of the original study could be adapted and incorporated into existing preparatory curricula and into diagnostic centers to assist both the administrative intern and the experienced practitioner. Consideration should also be given, however, to the inclusion of those executive skills required for successful implementation of shared governance and school-based management. Borrowing or adapting these skills from other disciplines or sources is a temporary measure; educators will need field-specific, customized training for

meaningful attitudinal change and subsequent successful implementation. If shared governance and school-based management are to become common practice on a national scale, whether by legislative fiat, as in Kentucky, or by school district initiative and innovation, their contexts of empowerment and improvement require a fundamental change in school district management functions and in superintendent leadership purview.

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